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Abstract. *This paper examines the feasibility of establishing a regional presidential primary for the Great Plains States. It reviews the introduction of primaries for selecting national convention delegates, and the slowness of these states to adopt this method. Further, it surveys the use of the primary in the region, noting the independence of Great Plains voters in both the pre-reform and post-reform periods. Finally, the paper recommends that Great Plains States adopt a regional primary; suggests they select the earliest possible date in order to enhance their influence on the selection of presidential nominees; and offers several alternative proposals, depending upon whether the states of Texas and, possibly, Oklahoma are retained as part of such a regional primary.*

The presidential primary has become the accepted method of selecting delegates to national party conventions. No longer is a primary simply a "beauty contest" in which presidential aspirants may demonstrate vote-getting abilities in the hope of attracting organizational support; nor is it a process by which "favorite sons" can gain blocs of delegates to be used as bargaining chips to select a standard bearer in a brokered convention. In the past generation, as Davis (1980) observed, the primary has become the main "road to the White House."

However, while most other states in the nation slowly but eventually joined the parade of primaries, a resistance to political change has created a serious problem for the Great Plains States. But for Nebraska and South Dakota, participants from the beginning, this region long remained a hold-out, resulting in further reduction of its already modest impact on the presidential nominating process. Even in the 1990s, North Dakota and South Dakota Democrats retained a caucus system, and Texas Democrats employed a hybrid system with approximately one-third of Texas delegates selected in a post-primary caucus. In 1996, Kansas decided to cancel both primaries as the incumbent president was unopposed and the Republican nominee had all but won the nomination by mid-March.

Is it too late for the road to the White House to take a detour through Bismarck and Pierre, to pass through Lincoln and Topeka, to include Oklahoma City and Austin on its route? Or, for that matter, any other Great Plains community? And, indeed, to make these significant stops along the way? In other words, is a Great Plains presidential primary feasible at this point in time?

The Great Plains is an area considered by many outsiders, including most presidential aspirants, as "flyover states," that is, states one flies over in traveling from one coast to the other. More seriously, this is a region that has been described as cutting "an immense swath through America," but also "our most static region, . . . changing only under extraordinary stress" (Peirce and Hagstrom 1983:29); as "a much greater area than is usually designated—an area which may be best defined in terms of topography, vegetation, and rainfall" (Webb 1931:3); and as "a hinterland, an area set apart" though making up as much as one-fifth of the land area of the United States (Kraenzel 1955:212).

While in agreement that vastness and isolation distinguish this area from other parts of the country, observers sometimes disagree as to exactly which states comprise this region. Virtually everyone is in accord when speaking of New England or the South—regions with distinct character and tradition. Even the label Border States conveys a signal set of political units. This is not necessarily the case regarding the Great Plains. Social historians have tended to take a geographical perspective, including at least portions of Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, and New Mexico (Webb 1931:3-5; Kraenzel 1955: 3). A leading political writer, on the other hand, discusses "the nine states of the Great Plains that constitute the very heart of the American continent" which in his view include the states of Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri (Peirce 1973:15).

For purposes of this paper, the Great Plains is defined narrowly as the column of states which bisect the nation from North Dakota south through Texas. There is justification for this decision. Iowa, Minnesota, and Missouri not only continue to cling to the caucus system for delegate selection but also lie east of the 98th meridian, the standard line of demarcation which regional writers have used to denote the eastern edge of the Great Plains. Likewise, Colorado, Montana, Wyoming, and New Mexico often are classified as Rocky Mountain states.

It is not easy to understand the slowness with which these Great Plains states embraced the direct primary as a form of delegate selection, especially given the history of populist, progressive, even radical political leanings—at

least within the three northern Plains states. For example, as one of the region's acclaimed historians pointed out in 1931:

> Woman's suffrage does not now come under the head of political radicalism, but it was so considered until a few years ago. . . . If we examine the history of the woman's movement, we find that it spread practically all over the Great Plains before it was adopted in the East. The map [showing the status of women's suffrage at the time the Nineteenth Amendment was adopted] tells the story; it makes clear what happened. . . . It was not the vaunted chivalry of the South nor the cool justice of the Brahman of the North that gave women the ballot. There is hidden somewhere in the cause the spirit of the Great Plains which made men democratic in deed and in truth. (Webb 1931:504-05)

However, Webb's (1931: 504) own map showed that Nebraska, North Dakota, and Texas were three of only five states between the 98th meridan and the Pacific Ocean, which did not grant women the right to vote prior to adoption of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

It would appear, therefore, that the spirit of democracy, at least in regard to women's suffrage, was slow to gain acceptance in several Plains states. They also initially proved no more eager than most to extend democratic theory into practice by adopting a direct primary to select convention delegates. Further, even after the post-1968 presidential nomination reforms were introduced to nearly every other portion of the country, non-primary Plains states remained resistant to change. This failure to adapt has not been a positive factor for the Great Plains states. Nor has the refusal, until very recently, to advance the dates of delegate-selection been of political benefit to the region. The increase in the number of states using primaries from only 15 as recently as 1968 to some 40 in 1996, the "frontloading" of primaries by the "megastates," and the move to establish same-day regional primaries in other parts of the country have combined to diminish the political importance of the Great Plains region. Consider the following:

1. While many other states jumped on the primary bandwagon, the Great Plains states continued to plod along. Consequently, they found their political voices muted. By selecting delegates mostly in scattered caucuses, the Great Plains states failed to gain the publicity focused by the national media on states with primary campaigns. Print

reporters and television commentators flocked to New Hampshire, and Iowa after 1976, and descended on Atlanta, Chicago, Los Angeles and other metropolitan centers, anointing winners and proclaiming losers. But these media people had little or no reason to cover the quiet caucuses and occasional primaries in the Great Plains.

2. In recent years, most of the nation's larger states have engaged in frontloading, that is they have rescheduled their primary elections to the early portion of a now sharply-reduced time frame or "window" for choosing delegates. This was done not only to counteract the perceived undue importance placed on the outcomes of the small-state Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary, but also to enhance their own importance in the overall process (Buell 1996:7). While this was happening, the Great Plains states largely refused to take heed. As a result, this region has failed to play a forceful role in the winnowing process. By the time the delegate-selection process reached most of the Great Plains states, there was no separation of worthwhile candidates from lesser ones which remained to be accomplished; many hopefuls, however qualified, had already been flushed from the system.

3. Among the Great Plains states, only Texas qualifies as one of the ten most populous megastates. It was not until 1988 that Texas, as well as Oklahoma, the region's second-largest state but only the nation's 28th in population, scheduled primaries in March in order to have an early impact on the nominating process. These states retained their March primaries in 1996 and, to their credit, the Dakotas also held early delegate-selection procedures that year (February Republican primaries and March Democratic caucuses); but Kansas (April) and Nebraska (May) continued to set their primaries well after the date by which most observers had expected the 1996 nominees already would be determined. In the meantime, seven of the other most populous states (all but Pennsylvania and New Jersey) also had moved their primaries into the month of March.

4. Finally, there has been the movement to create same-day regional primaries. The best-known of these is the South's "Super Tuesday" which gained prominence (though not as intended) in 1988 when 14 Southern and Border states, plus three other states, conducted primaries on March 8. But, in 1996 the Southern regional primary was less "super" with only seven states taking part and not even the first of the

regional primaries. Depending on the political party, it was not even necessarily the largest of the same-day delegate harvests available. As Table 1 shows, the nine states participating in the "Junior Tuesday" primaries actually selected more Democratic delegates (643) than those voting on Super Tuesday (535).

First, there was the "Yankee Primary" segment of Junior Tuesday (all New England states except, of course, New Hampshire on March 5, plus New York on March 7); three other states also conducted elections on March 5. Then came Super Tuesday on March 12, now involving only four Southern states, plus Oklahoma, Texas and Oregon. March 19 saw the initial "Big 10" or "Great Lakes Primary" (Illinois, Ohio and Wisconsin, plus Michigan Republicans). Finally, California, virtually a "region" of its own, with its cornucopia of delegates for both parties, voted March 26, along with Republicans in Nevada and Washington in a "West Coast Primary."

Because of the concentration of delegate selection in March, veteran political observers (Barone and Ujifusa 1995; Wayne 1996) anticipated well before the balloting even began that the presidential nominations would be decided in a 44-day period between the Iowa caucuses and the California primary. Over two-thirds of the delegates were to be selected in this time span. The combination of these three factors—the failure to adopt the primary until only recently, the frontloading by the more populous states, and the creation of several regional primaries—has not only crowded the Great Plains states out of primetime but also seriously hampered their chances of establishing a separate political identity.

In considering whether the creation of a Great Plains Presidential Primary is feasible—or even necessary, one need dwell not only on history but also on contemporary facts:

1. The Great Plains region consists of six states which, in spite of their locations, are not necessarily all that homogeneous. Elazar (1984) has distinguished three separate political subcultures within the United States. These political subcultures foster different political systems that function in distinctive ways although they share common governmental structure and political processes. His categories indicate that Oklahoma and Texas are especially different from the other Great Plains States.

He classifies the northern Great Plains states as being primarily influenced by the "moralistic" political culture; thus, politics is issue-oriented

TABLE 1
DELEGATE SELECTION IN REGIONAL PRIMARIES, 1996

	Democrat	Republican
JUNIOR TUESDAY (March 5)		
Yankee Primary		
Connecticut	53	27
Maine (D only)	23	---
Massachusetts	93	37
Rhode Island	22	16
Vermont	15	12
New York (March 7)	244	93[a]
(Yankee Primary Total)	450	185
Colorado	49	27
Georgia	76	42
Maryland	68	32
Junior Tuesday Total	643	101
SUPER TUESDAY (March 12)		
Florida	152	98
Louisiana	59	9[b]
Mississippi	38	33
Oklahoma	44	38
Oregon	47	23
Tennessee	68	38
Texas[c]	27	123
Super Tuesday Total	535	362
GREAT LAKES PRIMARY (March 19)		
Illinois	164	69
Michigan (R only)	---	57
Ohio	147	67
Wisconsin	93	36
Great Lakes Total	390	229
WEST COAST PRIMARY (March 26)		
California	363	165
Nevada (R only)	---	14
Washington (R only)	---	18
West Coast Total	363	197

[a] New York Republicans also selected 9 delegates in state convention.
[b] Louisiana Republicans also selected 21 delegartes in caucuses.
[c] Texas Democrats also selected 70 delegates, named by a delegate nominating committee, at a statewide caucus.

and programmatic, operating for the "public interest." In contrast, he considers Oklahoma and Texas as more closely associated with the "traditionalistic" political culture which dominates the states of the Old Confederacy; here, political purpose is more limited, the major goal being to maintain the status quo, that is, preserve the established order. Elazar notes that population growth and movement has altered these classifications somewhat and helped to keep cultural patterns fluid. All these states have been influenced to some degree by the "individualistic" subculture in which politics is more partisan and less oriented toward collective goals. But Oklahoma and Texas remain distinctly more in tune with the South, in terms of political culture, than with their Great Plains neighbors.

2. Except for Texas, all of the Great Plains states have modest populations, ranking in the lower half of the nation's states (from 28th to 47th in the 1990 census), and have correspondingly modest political influence. Excluding Texas, the remaining five states together have but 25 electoral votes, or 4.6% of the national total of 538. Including Texas' 32 electoral votes raises the Great Plains total to only 57, or 10.6% of the total.

3. These states together had but 328 of the 3,521 delegates selected in primaries or caucuses to the 1996 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, a mere 9.3%. These figures exclude 769 automatic or "super" delegates—officially "unpledged"—awarded by the party to a state's Democratic governor, members of Congress, national committee members, and others designated as "distinguished party leaders." The region supplied 252 of the 1,990 delegates to the 1996 Republican National Convention in San Diego, or 12.7%. Again excluding Texas (194 Democratic delegates and 123 Republican delegates selected in primaries or caucuses), the remaining Great Plains states had but 134, or 3.8% of the Democratic delegates, and 129, or 6.5% of the Republican delegates in 1996.

4. This, of course, brings us to the matter of Texas, which as the second largest state in area and the third most populous in the nation, dominates the region politically. With 194 Democratic delegates and 123 Republican delegates, Texas alone supplied 59.1%t of the Democrats and 48.8% of the Republicans chosen to attend national conventions from the region in 1996. In contemplating the feasibility of a

Great Plains presidential primary, one must consider whether the exclusion of Texas would be beneficial to the other states in the region.

Before speculating on where the Great Plains states might go from here, however, this paper will examine the evolution of the presidential nominating system in the Twentieth Century and review the participation of the Great Plains States in the process.

Development of Presidential Primaries

The introduction of the direct primary as a device for selecting delegates to a national party convention is the latest in a series of methods employed for choosing presidential nominees. In the 80 years from the first convention in 1832 to "the famous scene of political carnage" at the 1912 Republican convention "when Theodore Roosevelt stood at the Armageddon," (Moos and Hess 1960:22) the only basic change to the nomination process was the introduction and the widespread use of the presidential primary.

With the coming of the primary in the Twentieth Century, rank-and-file members of the political parties could formally participate in the delegate-selection process. This was intended to "democratize" the process, by taking the control over nominations away from the party bosses and shifting it to regular party supporters (Lengle 1981:7-9).

Florida was the first state to use the direct primary. In 1904, Florida's Democrats decided to replace the traditional caucus/convention system and allow party voters to select delegates under provisions of a new law permitting any recognized political party to hold a primary election. Wisconsin enacted a primary law in 1905 designed specifically for choosing convention delegates. Voters there employed it in 1908 to pick a Republican delegation pledged to Senator Robert LaFollette and the principles of the Progressive movement. Oregon went a step further in 1910, by providing not only for election of delegates from congressional districts but also by creating a presidential preference vote to "guide" delegates in their convention deliberations (David et al. 1960: 225). Celebrated as a cornerstone of Progressive Era reform efforts, the direct primary movement had spread by 1912 to some 13 states, including Nebraska, North Dakota, and South Dakota; four years later, parties in 20 states used some form of a presidential primary (Coleman et al. 1992:25).

With the end of the Progressive Era and the "return to normalcy" after World War I, the primary movement stalled. Some states, including North Dakota, abandoned the practice. Authorities, including Coleman (Coleman et al. 1992) and Wayne (1996), disagree over the exact number of states using primaries but, over the next six-plus decades, no more than 15 states consistently conducted presidential primaries in any form—from "beauty contest" to actual delegate selection.[1] Voter sentiment expressed in primaries had relatively little influence over convention decisions, not only because there were relatively few primaries held but also because most were in less populous states with relatively small convention delegations. State party organizations and political bosses from the larger states, therefore, continued to control presidential nominations, going along with popular sentiment only when it matched their desires.

The Old Order Changeth. The degree of organizational control is illustrated, and probably not overstated, by this recollection of Newton Minow. Head of the Federal Communications Commission during the Kennedy administration, Minow returned to Chicago after resigning his position. He describes a leisurely lunch in 1963 with Mayor Richard J. Daley, who asked:

> "Isn't there any political office that interests you?" I told him there was one: delegate to the Democratic National Convention from Illinois.
>
> He groaned, and said "Newt, why don't you ask me for something easy? That's the hardest thing you could ask me for. Everyone wants to be a delegate. Are you sure you're not interested in running for Governor or Senator?" (Minow 1979:8)

At that time, delegates in Illinois were picked by party leaders behind closed doors. As late as 1968, only 15 states used some form of the direct primary to select some or all of their delegates to the national conventions. That year, Democrats selected only 40.2% and Republicans but 38.1% of convention delegates in primary elections (Goldstein 1995:26). Thus, it was not all that surprising that Vice President Hubert Humphrey and former Vice President Richard Nixon, both longtime party figures, were convention nominees in 1968.

Humphrey, of course, was precluded from seeking the nomination until after the sudden withdrawal of President Lyndon Johnson on March 31. But he won the nomination on the first ballot, gaining two-thirds of the delegate votes despite not have entered a single primary. Wayne (1996:93) suggests

the vice president purposely delayed his entry into the race for a month in order to miss primary filing deadlines because he did not have the grassroots organization of other contenders. With this approach, he also was able to avoid anti-Vietnam protesters on the campaign trail.

Nixon, on the other hand, had actively campaigned in the primaries; he needed to demonstrate an ability to attract popular support following his losses in the 1960 presidential race and the 1962 California gubernatorial contest. Although he won more states and generally the larger states, Nixon narrowly lost the total popular primary vote to California Governor Ronald Reagan. Nixon managed a slender first-ballot victory by only 25 votes more than the 667 needed, as Reagan and New York Governor Nelson Rockefeller divided the opposition vote. One account of the 1968 Republican convention attributes the Nixon win to his long-range planning but also suggests that the party leadership viewed Reagan and Rockefeller as representing the extreme ends of the political spectrum. Thus, party regulars preferred Nixon as a "safer" and "more electable" candidate. Still, one observer implies that Nixon could have been nominated only on the first ballot and lists a number of "ifs" that might have "thrown the convention into chaos" had they occurred (White 1969:287-88). Had these slippages happened, a "dream ticket," proposed by publications such as *Time*, of Reagan and Rockefeller—in either order—might have resulted. Organization support was still significant in 1968, and primaries were not yet the corridor to power. However, the events of 1968 would be a watershed in American presidential politics.

The Humphrey first-ballot nomination victory was marred by the violence in the Chicago streets and raucous behavior in the convention hall, and his narrow popular vote defeat in the general election led to calls for reform of the nominating process, at least in the Democratic party. The result was the creation of the Commission on Party Structure and Delegate Selection, more commonly known as the "McGovern-Fraser Commission" after its cochairmen, South Dakota Senator George McGovern and Minnesota Representative Donald Fraser.

The Impact of Party Reforms. The work of the McGovern-Fraser Commission altered the process for selecting presidential nominees in four ways, not all of which necessarily had the intended result:

1. By banning caucus systems involving only party officials and officeholders, it led to the revitalization of the primary as the means for greater party rank-and-file participation.

2. By involving party activists in the process, as opposed to mainly party officials and officeholders and requiring proportionate representation of minorities, women, and youth, it led to the selection of Democratic convention delegates and, ultimately, several presidential nominees unrepresentative of the party's traditional voting population.

3. By failing to win the presidency in four of the five elections after adopting these reforms, it prompted the Democratic party to find it necessary to undergo a quadrennial reassessment of its delegate-selection procedures.

4. By requiring state parties to adhere to national party rules, it led state legislatures to revise statutes governing delegate selection which, in most states, applied to Republicans as well as to Democrats.

Since the new state legislation often applied to both parties, it would have a significant impact on Republicans. Without suffering the trauma and travail of changing party rules or delegate apportionment formulas on a quadrennial basis, yet conforming to the "open" selection process of the primary, Republicans by 1980 were choosing more delegates in primaries than were Democrats: 76% Republican to 71.8% Democrat (Goldstein 1996: 26). However, because Republicans were able to retain their basic party structure and rules, they generally were able to choose nominees who were more appealing to a broad spectrum of voters (Bibby 1996:178-83).

Super Tuesday and Friends. The increase in presidential primaries to 35 for both parties by 1980 created other problems for the nominating process. In the opinion of former President Gerald Ford, "The endless succession of primaries just bores voters." He also complained about the stress on candidates when primaries are scheduled on both coasts on the same days: "Airport appearances with cameras at work became the necessity of the day as exhausted candidates shuttled across the continent" (Ford 1985:4-5).

In response to national Democratic desires to compress the primary season, and also to increase its own significance in nominating politics, the South initiated the first regional primary. What would become known as "Super Tuesday"—15 presidential primaries conducted on March 8, 1988–began in 1980 on a much more modest scale. Encouraged by supporters of President Jimmy Carter, three southern states (Alabama, Georgia, and

Florida) scheduled primaries on the same day in 1980 to aid in his renomination fight against the challenge of Massachusetts Senator Edward Kennedy. This not only had the desired effect—Carter won a narrow renomination victory—but it also encouraged five non-southern states to join these three in 1984.

The rout of the liberal Democratic Mondale-Ferraro ticket in 1984, provided the greatest impetus to the creation of a "megaprimary" of 15 Southern and Border states four years later. The expressed hope in 1988 was not only to increase Democratic primary participation and counter the shift of moderate voters toward the Republican party, but also to expand Southern influence in the Democratic convention so as to produce a nominee "palatable" to Southerners—not a Humphrey, a McGovern, or a Mondale (Hadley and Stanley 1996:160-62).

Super Tuesday in 1988 turned out to be "a super fiasco" insofar as Democrats were concerned. A common assessment was this conclusion of two veteran journalists: "From the very beginning, it was a reform of far greater interest and importance to the politicians of the South than it was to the voters" (Germond and Witcover 1989:279). Rather than concentrating regional influence behind a single candidate, the multi-state primary effort produced three "winners"—two liberals, Massachusetts Governor Michael Dukakis and African-American activist Jesse Jackson, and Tennessee Senator Al Gore, a "raging moderate" who later received little support outside the South (Hadley and Stanley 1996:175). Dukakis and Jackson each won five Super Tuesday states, had an almost equal share of the popular vote, and claimed about the same number of delegates. Gore's major effect was to knock out moderate Missouri Congressman Richard Gephardt, who might have been acceptable to Southerners in the general election. Dukakis would use his victories as a springboard toward nomination, so Super Tuesday failed to produce the "palatable" candidate Southerners sought.

On the other side, this one-day voter extravaganza worked precisely as Southerners had hoped—but for Republicans who rallied around Vice President George Bush. In a tight race with Kansas Senator Robert Dole to this point, Bush won 16 of 17 Super Tuesday primaries and all but secured the Republican nomination.

In the aftermath of yet another Democratic presidential loss, in 1988, partisan critics complained that Super Tuesday was "too big" and lacked focus. Some Southern and Border states also felt slighted by the media attention paid to bigger states and opted out of Super Tuesday. The result was a scaled-back primary four years later—to just seven states—which, ironically, produced the desired outcome: the nomination of a 1992 candidate

acceptable to regional voters, Arkansas Governor Bill Clinton. While the South retrenched, however, the move toward regional primaries continued in other parts of the nation, even gaining momentum in the 1990s.

A National Primary? Political parties and state legislatures have not been the only entities concerned about and considering modifications to the presidential nominating process. The matter also has been a periodic concern of the United States Congress, although its only formal act has been to establish a presidential primary for the District of Columbia. Altogether, 272 proposals to impose some form of national control over the nominating process were introduced through 1979, according to one study (Gorman 1980). At least 16 additional bills relating to the candidate-selection process were introduced in the 1980s (Norrander 1992:20). Generally, such proposals advocate either a one-day national primary, or a series of regional primaries held within a set time frame.

Nearly 150 bills calling for the creation of a national direct primary regulated by statute to replace national conventions operating under party rules have been introduced in Congress since the idea was first proposed in 1911. Progressives included this provision in their 1912 party platform, and President Wilson proposed it to Congress in 1913. Not surprisingly, most of the reform proposals coincided in time with a perceived crisis in the nominating system: the Republican nomination in 1912, and the Democratic conventions of 1952, 1968, and 1972 (Gorman 1980:9). However, when the particular crisis passed, interest in reform waned. Indeed, while many bills were introduced, only three measures reached the floor of even one federal house, and none came close to passing (Ranney 1978:1)

This overwhelming degree of failure on the part of advocates of a nationally-regulated presidential nomination process has not deterred the Congress from continuing to consider some means of "federalizing" presidential nominations. Support for a national direct primary, obviously never very robust, has declined to virtually nothing in recent years. As more states adopted this method of selecting delegates, even on a piecemeal basis, national legislators apparently lost interest. Likewise, backers of bills to compress the delegate-selection process into a period of four months or less have seen their goal achieved through Democratic party rules changes and subsequent state legislation. However, there has been recent interest in mandating a series of regional or "time zone" primaries in order to eliminate, or reduce, the crazy-quilt pattern now in place.

Congressional interest in a regional primary concept dates from 1972. The basic purpose of each of the more than two dozen proposals of this type

was similar to that stated in a 1988 Senate committee report: "to provide more order to the process by which Presidential candidates are selected by each party and to assure that no state has inordinate influence in the process" (U.S. Government, Senate 1988). Supporters usually came from the moderate-to-liberal wings of both parties in both chambers but even conservative members have entered the debate.

Senator Dan Quayle of Indiana, for example, displayed interest in 1981 and 1983. In 1981, he introduced legislation providing for a series of regional presidential primary elections. Senator Quayle argued that the proliferation of primaries and the consequent lengthening of the nominating process had resulted in "disturbing levels of voter apathy and candidate fatigue." In his bill, he also maintained that the disproportionate impact of a few state primaries "impugns the integrity" of the nominating process and that the random scheduling of primaries acts "to prevent voters from receiving a clear comparison among candidates" (U.S. Government, Senate 1981). This bill would have set up four regional primaries to be held on the second Tuesday of March and each of the next three months, the scheduling to be determined by lot by the Federal Election Commission. The bill, however, did not receive a committee hearing.

Two years later, calling the process in 1980 "a serialized national primary, like some bad soap opera," Quayle proposed the "Presidential Primaries Timing Act." This bill would have established a system of regional primaries to be held on the second Tuesday of four consecutive months, March through June, with the regions "defined so as to correspond with the time zones within the United States." Adoption of this method, he said, would eliminate the biggest flaw in the current system—"that it makes irrelevant the votes of those casting their ballots late in the primary system" (U.S. *Congressional Record* 1983:18496). Although this proposal also failed to receive a committee hearing, the idea attracted some bipartisan support. Charles T. Manatt (1985:211), a former Democratic National Chairman, endorsed "time-zone" primary concept in principle in 1985.

In the 1990s, however, Congressional interest has waned as various state efforts to conduct regional, same-day primaries appear to have satisfied national legislators, at least in regard to shortening the length of the primary process.

Great Plains Primaries: The Pre-Reform Period

The early Progressive era direct primary movement and its later stagnation, the perceived failure of national conventions of either party to reflect

the expression of popular will, and the later impact of party reforms and reduction of the delegate-selection time frame have been felt in the Great Plains states. However, these factors were experienced to a greater extent in the northern states of the region in the first 60 years of the Twentieth Century, or the "pre-reform" period.

Two Great Plains states—Nebraska and South Dakota—have employed the primary to select delegates to national party conventions without interruption since 1912. In Nebraska, voters have elected primary delegates who ran uncommitted, separately from a nonbinding presidential preference poll. The preference poll, however, often was treated with some respect and "apparently had some influence on early balloting at conventions" (David et al. 1994:532). In South Dakota, aspiring delegates could seek election either as "no preference" delegates or as "pledged" with a candidate's consent. Contests between delegate slates, either "pledged" or "no preference" occurred frequently; even "no preference" slates often actually had a preferred candidate (David et al. 1994:227, 241).

North Dakota also adopted a primary in 1912 to "advise" delegates but abandoned its use after 1932. The state did not utilize the primary again until 1980, and then only for the selection of Republican delegates as Democrats preferred to retain the caucus system. Other Great Plains states have embraced the primary only very recently, with pledged candidates being the rule. Kansas held its first primary in 1980 but not again until 1992. Both Oklahoma and Texas established primaries in 1988, although Texas Republicans did choose delegates via the primary route in 1964.

The Republican Experience. For much of the Twentieth Century, Great Plains primary voters, particularly Republicans, displayed remarkable independence (or isolation) from national trends, rarely preferring the eventual nominee. Indeed, until 1956, President Calvin Coolidge (1924) was the only Republican nominee to be victorious in the region's primaries; even he was defeated by a narrow margin in South Dakota. Perhaps, this should be treated only as an idle curiosity, for the popular feeling of two small states (and, for a time, a third) had little impact on the ultimate decision. However, where rank-and-file voters could express their preferences, these often differed from the selections of the party-dominated caucus/convention states, not only in the Great Plains but also in other areas of the nation. Further, it demonstrates that voters in this region usually supported candidates decidedly more liberal than those eventually gaining the presidential nominations. Over these four decades, Great Plains primary voters displayed their preferences for former President Theodore Roosevelt, Wisconsin Senator

TABLE 2
REPUBLICAN PRIMARY PREFERENCES AND NOMINEES, 1912-1996

	Kansas	Nebraska	N. Dakota	Okla.	S. Dakota	Texas	Nominee
1912	---	Roosevelt	LaFollette	---	Roosevelt	---	W.H.Taft
1916	---	Cummins	LaFollette	---	Cummins	---	Hughes
1920	---	Johnson	Johnson	---	Wood	---	Harding
1924	---	Coolidge	Coolidge	---	Johnson	---	Coolidge
1928	---	Norris	Lowden	---	unpledged	---	Hoover
1932	--	France	France	--	Johnson	---	Hoover
1936	---	Borah	---	---	Green*	---	Landon
1940	--	Dewey	---	---	unpledged	---	Willkie
1944	---	Stassen	---	---	Christopherson*	---	Dewey
1948	---	Stassen	---	---	unpledged	---	Dewey
1952	---	R.Taft	---	---	R.Taft	---	Eisenhower
1956	---	Eisenhower	---	---	Eisenhower	---	Eisenhower
1960	---	Nixon	---	---	unpledged	---	Nixon
1964	---	Goldwater	---	---	unpledged	Goldwater	Goldwater
1968	---	Nixon	---	---	Nixon	---	Nixon
1972	---	Nixon	---	---	Nixon	---	Nixon
1976	---	Reagan	---	---	Reagan	---	Ford
1980	Reagan	Reagan	---	---	Reagan	Reagan	Reagan
1984	---	Reagan	Reagan	---	---	Reagan	Reagan
1988	---	Bush	Bush	Bush	Dole	Bush	Bush
1992	Bush	Bush	Bush	Bush	Bush	Bush	Bush
1996	---	Dole	Dole	Dole	Dole	Dole	Dole

*Favorite son.

Robert LaFollette, California Senator Hiram Johnson, and Nebraska Senator George Norris, none of whom became the party's standard-bearer.

Table 2 shows Great Plains Republican primary vote preferences compared to the eventual convention choice from 1912 through 1996.

Several examples from the more contested Republican conventions illustrate the independence of primary-selected delegates from Nebraska and the Dakotas. In 1912, seven of these states' 36 delegates supported Roosevelt; the remaining 29 voted "present" rather than support nominee William Howard Taft. In 1920, Nebraska and South Dakota stayed unanimously with Leonard Wood and North Dakota was split between Wood and Frank Lowden through nine ballots. Only on the tenth and final ballot did 17 of these states' delegates vote for nominee Warren Harding; 12 remained steadfast with Wood.

The region's primary voters reflected the widespread feeling against incumbent but less than popular President Herbert Hoover in 1932. South Dakota overwhelmingly backed a slate for Johnson, and Nebraska and North Dakota voters gave strong support to Dr. Joseph France, a former Senator from Maryland. France today is but a footnote in political history, but he won seven of 14 primaries (although narrowly losing his home state) and gained 48% of the popular vote that year. However, France was rejected at the convention by party leaders who considered France a stalking horse for former President Calvin Coolidge and feared he would attempt to throw his support to Hoover's predecessor. France, in fact, was ejected from the convention hall by Chicago police at the behest of Hoover supporters before he had an opportunity to speak or have his name placed in nomination (Schlesinger 1957:296). With no other candidates to support, the region's delegates capitulated to the inevitable, casting 37 of 39 votes for Hoover on the only ballot of the 1932 convention.

After this point, however, the region's two primary states were more in step with national Republican attitudes. On three occasions, however, they perhaps reflected grass-roots feelings more than did the party organization. In 1948, both states gave majorities to Harold Stassen and backed Thomas Dewey only when the nomination was made unanimous. In 1952, doubtless the more dramatic, Ohio Senator Robert Taft, victor in six of 13 primaries with 36% of the primary vote, was turned down by a convention desperately seeking a winner. In a divisive conclave, Republicans turned to General Dwight Eisenhower who had finished second in the primary balloting, winning five states and 27% of the primary vote. Nebraska supported Taft 13 to 4 over Eisenhower, and South Dakota gave all 14 votes to Taft. Even when states began shifting votes, after Eisenhower's nomination was assured, 11 Nebraskans continued to support Taft, and the South Dakota delegation divided 7 to 7.

The other instance came in 1964. Although Arizona Senator Barry Goldwater, the eventual nominee, carried Nebraska that year with a plurality of 49.1%, the state's balloting was perhaps indicative of the deep Republican cleavage in the nation: the 1960 ticket of Nixon (31.5%) and Henry Cabot Lodge (16.3%) garnered nearly as many votes as Goldwater as write-in candidates. Even more suggestive of the impending Republican disaster was the result in South Dakota when a slate of unpledged delegates defeated a Goldwater slate slightly more than two-to-one. Both Nebraska and South Dakota returned to the fold in 1968 and 1972, giving Nixon overwhelming support.

TABLE 3
DEMOCRATIC PRIMARY PREFERENCES AND NOMINEES, 1912-1996

	Kansas	Nebraska	N. Dakota	Okla.	S. Dakota	Texas	Nominee
1912	---	Clark	Burke*	---	Wilson	---	Wilson
1916	---	Wilson	Wilson	---	Wilson	---	Wilson
1920	---	Hitchcock*	others+	---	others	---	Cox
1924	---	McAdoo	McAdoo	---	McAdoo	---	Davis
1928	---	Hitchcock*	Smith	---	unpledged	---	Smith
1932	---	Roosevelt	Roosevelt	---	Roosevelt	---	Roosevelt
1936	---	Roosevelt	---	---	Roosevelt	---	Roosevelt
1940	---	Roosevelt	---	---	unpledged	---	Roosevelt
1944	---	Roosevelt	---	---	Hildebrandt*	---	Roosevelt
1948	---	Truman	---	---	Truman	---	Truman
1952	---	Kefauver	---	---	Kefauver	---	Stevenson
1956	---	Kefauver	---	---	Kefauver	---	Kefauver
1960	---	Humphrey	---	---	Humphrey	---	J.Kennedy
1964	---	Johnson	---	---	unpledged	---	Johnson
1968	---	R.Kennedy	---	---	R.Kennedy	---	Humphrey
1972	---	McGovern	---	---	McGovern	---	McGovern
1976	---	Church	---	---	Carter	---	Carter
1980	Carter	Carter	---	---	E.Kennedy	Carter	Carter
1984	---	Hart	Hart	---	Hart	---	Mondale
1988	---	Dukakis	Dukakis	Gore	Gephardt	Dukakis	Dukakis
1992	Clinton	Clinton	others	Clinton	Kerrey	Clinton	Clinton
1996	---	Clinton	Clinton	Clinton	Clinton	Clinton	Clinton

*Favorite son.
+Scattered write-ins; fewer than 400 voters participated.

The Democrat Experience. Table 3 shows the choices of Democratic primary voters and the convention nominees from 1912 through 1996. Great Plains Democrats proved more likely to support candidates who eventually claimed the party's presidential nomination, although they also demonstrated their independence from national trends at times during this period, especially in the early years.

The outstanding example is the marathon 103-ballot convention of 1924 when Democrats finally nominated Wall Street lawyer James Davis. Delegates from Nebraska and the Dakotas had strongly supported William McAdoo through 50 ballots, then began voting for a variety of candidates—anyone but Davis. Indeed, only one vote was cast—by a Nebraska delegate—for Davis from the region's primary states during the entire 17-day proceedings. However, beginning in 1928 and for the remainder of this

period, Nebraska and South Dakota Democrats made choices which paralleled popular feeling in much of the nation.

One notable exception was Tennessee Senator Kefauver, the choice of both states in 1952 and 1956. In 1952, Kefauver won 12 of 15 primaries with nearly 65% of the primary vote. But he lost the nomination to the "reluctant" candidate, Illinois Governor Adlai Stevenson, who had not actively contested any primaries. Kefauver finished second in 1956 to a more energetic Stevenson's 51% of the primary vote. Although Kefauver did receive 39% at the polls, his delegate numbers were so low his name was not placed in nomination. However, many observers believe his popular-vote showing led to his selection as the vice-presidential nominee in the "open balloting" of that year's convention. Indeed, Kefauver is said to have impressed the bosses with his "ability to pull support from ordinary voters in primaries that could coerce headlines and television attention," by one political writer who then declared (with the benefit of a quarter-century's hindsight):

> After 1956, conventions would no longer choose the nominee; he would emerge as the survivor of the primary trail. And the excitement of the convention would be largely synthetic, packaged for projection outward in the contest between the two parties to grab, dominate, or control public attention. (White 1982:85)

Nebraska gave overwhelming support to Senator John Kennedy of Massachusetts (1960), President Lyndon Johnson (1964), and Senator Robert Kennedy of New York (1968). South Dakota, however, supported Senator Hubert Humphrey from neighboring Minnesota in 1960, selected unpledged delegates (who backed President Johnson) in 1964, and gave Robert Kennedy 49.5% of the Democratic primary vote in 1968. Curiously, the state's Democrats that year awarded President Johnson 30% of their votes even though he had withdrawn from the race more than two months before the June 4 balloting. In 1972, both states favored Senator McGovern. He ran unopposed in his home state of South Dakota, and the eventual Democratic nominee gained a 41.3% plurality among 13 candidates in Nebraska.

The crowded Democratic field in Nebraska in 1972 would soon become more the norm than the exception. It was an indication of things to come as the reforms spawned by the McGovern-Fraser Commission and subsequent party bodies would affect presidential nominating politics in both parties in states across the nation. States in the Great Plains, however, would join the primary parade rather later than most.

Great Plains Primaries: The Post-Reform Period

Despite the spate of party reform efforts nationally, these did not have an immediate impact on the Great Plains States. As indicated in the opening of this paper, it was not until 1992 that all six states employed some form of the primary. One reason these states did not adopt the primary more quickly was that their legislatures were usually controlled by Republicans, who were not enthused to apply Democratic-inspired reforms to both political parties. Even nominally Democratic Texas was not excited about conforming wholly to the national party approach.

In the post-reform period, however, those Plains states which used primary elections continued occasionally to express preferences contrary to the eventual party choices. In 1976, both Nebraska and South Dakota Republican voters supported Ronald Reagan rather than President Ford. South Dakota Democrats did support Jimmy Carter but those in Nebraska, even as late as May 11, still preferred Idaho Senator Frank Church by a narrow margin.

In 1980, Kansas and Texas joined the ranks of Great Plains States with primaries. Republicans in the four states all supported Reagan, and Democrats in three Plains states backed President Carter for renomination. But South Dakota Democrats, voting June 3, gave a narrow victory to Senator Edward Kennedy over the incumbent. Republican primary voters throughout the Great Plains states enthusiastically endorsed President Reagan in 1984—although Kansas had dropped the procedure and South Dakota did not bother with a primary as the president had no Republican opposition. On the Democratic side, Texas did not hold a primary but the party's voters in Nebraska and the Dakotas considered Colorado Senator Gary Hart a better alternative than Mondale by substantial margins.

The number of Great Plains primaries increased to five in 1988 with Oklahoma entering the fold. Republicans in four states backed Vice President Bush, and Democrats in three states went for Dukakis. However, South Dakota, balloting in February, supported each party's early front-runners, Republican Senator Robert Dole and Democratic Congressman Gephardt. Oklahoma Democrats gave Gore more votes than Gephardt and Dukakis combined.

In 1992, with all six Great Plains states conducting primaries for the first time, there was considerable agreement between the region's preferences and the national conventions' choices. All states backed President Bush by wide margins over Patrick Buchanan in those states where the latter

was on the ballot. Democrats, except in the Dakotas, showed strong support for Arkansas Governor Clinton. In South Dakota, the eventual Democratic nominee finished third in February voting behind Nebraska Senator Robert Kerrey and Iowa Senator Tom Harkin. In North Dakota, a slate for "other" in essentially advisory balloting received 85.5% of the vote. President Clinton and Senator Dole swept the region—as was the case nationwide—in 1996.

This summary of Great Plains States' presidential preferences indicates that primary voters in this region have not feared to express their distinctiveness. This was particularly true in the first 60 years although, admittedly, only Nebraska and South Dakota offer any substantial examples.

Prior to the initiation of the modern delegate-selection reforms in 1972, Democratic voters were more likely to support a candidate other than the eventual party nominee. Even in the post-reform period, Democrats have been only slightly more inclined to agree with the convention choice. Republican voters proved even less favorable toward the eventual convention choice prior to 1972 but have been overwhelmingly in agreement with convention choices in the post-reform period.

In 36 primaries conducted in North Dakota (1912-1932), South Dakota (1912-1968), and Nebraska (1912-1968), Democrats gave the party's standard bearer their support 15 times and preferred some other individual or an unpledged slate 21 times. Indeed, 10 of the 15 times the voters' choices matched the conventions' decisions came when they supported an incumbent president. Republicans were even more likely to prefer someone other than the convention selection: in 36 primaries in these three states, Republican party's primary voters agreed with convention nominees only eight times, and four of these involved an incumbent president.

On the other hand, in the post-reform era, both regional parties have been more in step with convention decisions. This is particularly true of Republicans who have sent delegations supporting the eventual nominee in 24 of 27 primary elections held since 1972. The task was made easier for Republicans in this period as they were usually renominating a sitting president. The only negatives came when primary voters in both Nebraska and South Dakota rejected President Ford in favor of Reagan in 1976, and South Dakota voters turned down Vice President Bush for Senator Robert Dole in 1988. Democratic voters would seem to have remained more at odds with their conventions' choices. Excluding the unanimous support given incumbent President Clinton in 1996, Democratic primary participants preferred the eventual nominees only 12 of 21 times between 1972 and 1992. However, six of the nine rejections occurred in the Dakotas. South Dakota, in

particular, has registered a contrary streak. Not only did its Democratic primary voters opt for some other candidate in each of the primaries from 1980 through 1992, but a majority of its delegation (10 of 19) stayed with Kennedy (1980) and Hart (1984) even though these candidates had no hope of winning nomination.

Is a Regional Primary Needed—or Feasible?

The review of the evolution of the nominating process indicates that not only have most states embraced the direct primary as the delegate-selection method of choice but that, by 1996, several groupings of states have tried to enhance their regional clout by scheduling same-day primaries. The review also shows that the Great Plains States have been rather ambivalent about adopting the primary method on an individual basis, not to mention considering it collectively. Thus, the question of whether these states should—or could—join together in creating a regional presidential primary is not an easy one to answer.

Advocates of a Great Plains regional primary can point to standard justifications: regional primaries would focus attention on each region and enhance its image; they would require candidates to focus on particular concerns of each region's residents; they would ease the physical strain on the candidates; and they would prove more cost-effective by reducing media expenses because television markets cross state borders.

All of these reasons have validity, and the first two certainly should be of interest to the Great Plains states. However, except for Texas, there are no major television markets which could cover the region sufficiently so as to reduce media costs or ease the physical burden on candidates seeking support in a tier of states reaching more than 1,600 miles from north to south. Further, those not in favor of a Great Plains regional primary can show that this region is not as homogeneous as others which have a common political culture.

Yet another reason for not holding a same-day primary has been that the legislatures of the several states would be compelled to revise state laws involving filing deadlines and the like in order to establish a common date. Traditionally, Plains legislators have been reluctant to schedule early primaries for two reasons: their own electoral concerns and the added costs of establishing separate state and presidential primaries. While a March primary might be better for a state in terms of permitting voters to consider a larger field of presidential hopefuls and enhancing its political influence, it

might not be beneficial for state legislators if it took place while the legislature was still in session. Moreover, the expense of conducting separate elections, especially considering the normally low voter turnout, has been difficult to justify.

By 1996, however, such objections did not seem to be a major problem for Great Plains states. Both North and South Dakota held Republican presidential primaries February 27, then conducted state primaries in June. Texas held a combined presidential-state primary March 12, and Nebraska scheduled a joint primary May 14. However, Kansas had no difficulty in scheduling a presidential primary April 2 and a state primary August 6; and Oklahoma voted for convention delegates March 12 but deferred its state primary until August 27.

There are more compelling reasons than these, however, which make the creation of a Great Plains presidential primary appear problematical:

1. There is relatively little at stake insofar as delegates are concerned. With but 328 (9.3%) of the elected delegates to the 1996 Democratic National Convention and only 252 (12.7%) of the Republican delegates, the Great Plains states would not appear to offer a collective prize comparable to those which attract candidates to other regional primaries.

2. There is the major problem of timing. Given the front-loading efforts of other states, indicated earlier by Table 1, it appears virtually impossible to schedule a Great Plains Primary in an already crowded and shortened time frame so as to provide it with a separate identity. In other words, with the first three Tuesdays in March already hosting other regional primaries and with California having advanced its primary to the fourth Tuesday in March, at least in 1996, there seems to be no date on which the Great Plains states may stand alone.

3. Texas dominates the region. Would a Great Plains Primary have significance without the participation of a state which in 1996 had nearly three-fifths of the Democratic delegates and almost half the Republican delegates elected from the region? The remaining Great Plains states face this difficulty: a regional primary without Texas may have little meaning; but including Texas might render the remaining states peripheral and inconsequential to campaigning in the Lone Star State.

Given these considerations, some critics may feel there would be no compelling reason for the Great Plains states to enter the lists of the regional primaries. This author believes otherwise: for if these states wish to gain greater political visibility, a regional primary is all but compulsory.

The Great Plains states should take immediate steps to create a regional primary. Such action would not only consolidate the now scattered impact of this area's voters upon national politics but also would provide a forum in which its residents could encourage national candidates to address problems and concerns of regional interest. The potential obstacles associated with establishing such a primary are far from insurmountable.

1. The creation of a Great Plains Primary can be accomplished with relative ease. As four states already hold state primaries at different times than those scheduled for presidential delegate-selection, the choosing of a common date would seem likely to cause relatively little disruption of the present scheduling. At present, only Nebraska would need to alter its primary dates in any significant manner.

2. Comparing figures for 1996, the Great Plains states do not offer a delegate prize equal to those of the Junior Tuesday, Super Tuesday, Great Lakes, or West Coast primaries. However, as Table 4 shows, the number of Great Plains Republican delegates is greater than those at stake in the Yankee Primary: 251 from the Great Plains to 209 for the northeastern states. If the megastates (Texas and New York) are excluded, the Great Plains still provide more Republican delegates (128 to 107). The numbers are not as good for Democrats: the Great Plains states have only 397 delegates to 450 from the northeastern states, and just 168 to 206 when the megastates are omitted.

Simply stated, Democratic numbers for the Great Plains states will never be as sizable as those of the New England area. This is due to the smaller population of the Great Plains and to the formula used by Democrats to allot delegates: a combination of a state's population and its percentage of the party's presidential popular vote averaged over the last three elections (Bibby 1996:181-82). However, Republicans in the Great Plains states, by holding a common-date primary, could expect to become as grand a prize as the more-storied northeastern states. Even with their smaller numbers, Democrats could increase their national influence by joining in a same-day delegate-selection, especially if the event were conducted early in the primary season.

TABLE 4
DELEGATES SELECTED IN YANKEE PRIMARY AND GREAT PLAINS STATES, 1996

YANKEE PRIMARY	Democrats	Republicans
Connecticut	53	27
Maine	23	15 (caucus)
Massachusetts	93	37
Rhode Island	22	16
Vermont	15	12
New York	244	102
Total	450	209
Without New York	206	107
GREAT PLAINS STATES		
Kansas[a]	42 (caucus)	31 (caucus)
Nebraska	34	23
North Dakota	22 (caucus)	18
Oklahoma	52	38
South Dakota	18 (caucus)	18
Texas	229	123
Total	397	251
Total Without Texas	168	128

[a] Kansas scheduled but cancelled its primaries in 1996.

3. There is the question of timing. There is no question that the Great Plains states should jointly select as early a date as possible in order to be as effectual as possible. There are several scenarios which may be considered.

It likely is not possible for all states to move both parties' primaries to the last Tuesday in February, joining the North and South Dakota Republican primaries. Republicans, however, could do this; a change in party rules adopted at the 1996 Republican convention permits any state to conduct a primary on or after February 1. Democratic party rules, however, permit delegate-selection to take place only after the first Tuesday in March of each presidential year, but for the excepted states of Iowa, Maine, New Hampshire, and South Dakota. It would appear imperative for the Great Plains

states, if they wish to enhance their political visibility, to conduct a common-date primary as early in the season as possible. Therefore, they should agree to one of two approaches: hold Republican delegate-selection on the final Tuesday in February, or conduct both party's delegate-selection on the first Tuesday in March, in direct competition with a Yankee Primary as part of Junior Tuesday. It is true this would provide two major centers of attention for both candidates and the media. But figures indicate the Great Plains states have as much to offer as the northeastern states—presently the prime focus of Junior Tuesday—and a great deal to gain in terms of political stature.

A potential, yet less viable, solution would be for the other Plains states to join with Oklahoma and, especially, Texas in conducting primaries on the second Tuesday in March—joining the Super Tuesday group. Yet another possibility—workable but unsatisfactory due to its lateness in the primary season—would be for all states to agree on the third Tuesday of that month, expanding the Great Lakes Primary to something on the order of a Great Midwest Primary.[2] While either of these moves would enhance the political influence of the Great Plains, particularly that of the northern states, it is not as satisfactory a solution as a free-standing, geographically-distinct primary as early as possible in the primary season.

Perhaps, the most viable—and, admittedly, the most radical—solution would be to divide the Great Plains states between two regional primaries, placing the northern states in one in early March while continuing the affiliation of Oklahoma and Texas with the Super Tuesday states. This is not an option to be considered lightly. These states share a long and storied history with the northern Great Plains, dating from even before cattlemen of south Texas drove their herds northward along the Chisholm Trail through Indian Territory to the railheads in Kansas.

But, as has been indicated, Oklahoma and Texas share significant political and cultural characteristics with those Southern states which have participated in the Super Tuesday balloting. Such a division would not only enhance both the visibility and the input of the northern Plains states in the delegate-selection process, but also would eliminate the probability of a Texas-Oklahoma domination in a Great Plains Primary. However, Oklahoma's Southern political leaning is modified somewhat along its border with Kansas, placing it in a transitional position both geographically and politically (Shelley and Archer 1984). It is therefore possible that Oklahoma might also feel comfortable participating apart from Texas, allowing the Sooner State to be the largest member of a five-state same-day primary.

Whichever choice—if any—the Great Plains states make, it will also be impacted by actions of other states. For example, California's 1996 primary date was only an experiment; it may allow its primary to revert to its traditional June date. However, some California legislators have advocated advancing its balloting to the first Tuesday in March (Stall 1996). This could maximize California's political impact to the detriment of other frontloading states, since California has more than 10 percent of the delegate total in each party.

In contrast, Illinois has discussed moving its primary back, perhaps to the last Tuesday in June. While some Illinois legislators worry that this move would reduce the state's political clout on the national scene, other Illinois officials suggest that a shortened campaign season would help maintain voter interest and reduce campaign costs (Christian 1997). Such an action would certainly reduce the impact of a Great Lakes Primary. Although far from the most attractive alternative, this could also make the third Tuesday of March available if the Great Plains states desired a later date.

Thus, any of the proposed "solutions" for the Great Plains states could be influenced by the actions of other states, and would require enabling legislation in each individual Great Plains state. But, the time to act is now. The election of 2000 will be a non-incumbent affair. Vice President Gore certainly will draw challenges from other Democrats, and there appears to be no shortage of Republican hopefuls. Great Plains voters could have an amplified voice if a same-day regional primary is created.

The Dakotas might object to relinquishing whatever early prominence they now have. Kansas and Nebraska might complain about advancing their primary dates and, in the case of Nebraska, either moving its state primary up some two months or conducting separate federal and state primary elections. Oklahoma and Texas might refuse to give up their participation in the Super Tuesday extravaganza, or not desire to be separated. However, failing to take action of some sort will mean that most Great Plains states will remain hitchhikers on the road to the White House.

Notes

1. Although sources differ on the exact number of primaries, the figures used throughout this paper for consistency are from, *Congressional Quarterly's Guide to U.S. Elections*, 3d ed. (Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly, Inc., 1994).

2. The Quayle regional primary bill of 1981 would have achieved essentially this grouping. It created "region 3" composed of all Great Plains

states except Texas, along with Iowa, Illinois, Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Missouri, Arkansas, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Puerto Rico.

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